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Edward Taylor: The Recurrent Theme of the Mystical Union

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EDWARD TAYLOR: THE RECURRENT

THEME OF THE MYSTICAL UNION
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BY

NAOMI RUTH GIESEKING

THESIS

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The Experience

Oh! that I alwayes breath'd in such an aire,
As I suckt in, feeding on sweet Content!
Disht up unto my Soul ev'n in that pray're
Pour'de out to God over last Sacrament.
What Beam of Light wrapt up my sight to finde
Me neerer God than ere Came into my minde.

--Edward Taylor

A recurrent theme in the poetry of Edward Taylor is the mystical union, "mee neerer God," that occurred between the true believer and Christ during the Lord's Supper. This theme occurs throughout the two hundred seventeen poems of the Preparatory Meditations. As the Puritan minister sought by way of meditation to put himself into the proper state of mind and heart for the sacrament he considered the most important of the church, his poetry reveals that he was sometimes joyful and confident but at other times sad and discouraged as he contemplated himself in relation to the Christ he loved. Regardless of the feelings he had as he sat down to prepare himself for the partaking of and the administering of the Lord's Supper, the mystical union itself was invariably an ecstatic experience for Edward Taylor.

During his meditation period following the preparation of the Lord's Day sermon, Edward Taylor followed the long-practiced process of meditation which had been used by the Jesuits and had come to the Puritans, with modifications, from Richard Baxter and others. The basic steps involved Memory, Understanding, and Will. In applying these steps to his own self-examination, Edward Taylor regularly begins his Meditation with the consideration of the doctrine for the next sermon; the doctrine he has already determined through the laying-open of the scriptural text. In his meditative poetry, then, he sets the subject for the poem in the first line or lines, and proceeds to analyze the situation as fully as

he can by considering in multiple ways its meanings, applications, and ramifications. This logical analysis brings him to the concluding stanza, regularly an exhortation, with the final two lines expressing his promise to praise and give thanks if his petition is granted.

All his poems of meditation deal with himself and are his efforts to get the Lord's truths already set forth in his sermons, from his head to his heart. He verbalizes this attempt in Meditation 1:41. Joh. 14:2. I go to prepare a place for you. Throughout this poem Taylor comments on the mental aspects of perceiving Christ's grace. He begins, "A Clew of Wonders! Clustered Miracles!" and develops his poem by using "wonderment," "phansies," "wondring contemplation," "tumbling thoughts," "eternal wisdom," reviews Christ's actions that are cause for such wonderment, and returns in stanza five to "wonders," "big belli'd wonders," "a clew of wonders," until in stanza six his mind is saturated with contemplations of the wonders of Christ, and his reason can absorb no more. What remains to be absorbed is too high above reason's comprehension, for it can be comprehended only by the heart and love; the poet tells his reason to remain silent for a while and let his heart and love take over:

> Reason, lie prison'd in this golden Chain.
> Chain up thy tongue, and silent stand a while.
> Let this rich Love thy Love and heart obtain
> To tend thy Lord in all admiring Style.[1] (1:41, 36-40)

Thus Taylor voices his need for meditation in stating his belief

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[1]Donald E. Stanford, The Poems of Edward Taylor (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), p. 67. All subsequent quotations from The Preparatory Meditations, both Series One and Series Two, are from this edition.

that reason can go only so far in enabling man to comprehend the grace of Christ; the heart and love must take over ultimately. In his meditative poems he poetically uses the process of analysis to help him attain the proper spirit of love for his Lord's Day Sacrament. Great then is the joy and ecstasy that for him ensues from loving and fitting contemplation of the mystical union. For the sake of clarity in dealing with his poems, one can place them into the two large categories of "happy poems" and "dejected poems," thereby reflecting his attitudes of mind prior to the meditation. "Happy" poems include those that, through the emanating mood, show the poet as tender, serene, confident, or exuberant; the "dejected poems" reveal through the mood created by the imagery that the poet sees himself as base, unworthy, inadequate or sinning.

The poem, "The Experience" (pp. 8-9) serves wonderfully as an introduction to this singular minister-poet, for it seems to epitomize Edward Taylor and what he seeks to capture in his Meditations. The only missing ingredient, his recurrent intense awareness of man's depravity, is found in the poem that follows it, "The Return," (pp. 9-10). In "The Experience," Taylor dwells lovingly upon the feeling that seems to predominate when all his Meditations are considered: the sensation of deep contentment associated for him with the Lord's Supper, even in the prayer that accompanies the service. He asserts his ecstasy in the Lord's Supper: the shine of sanctifying grace fills his soul until he knows that his nature and Christ's nature are "together joyn'd" in "Him that's Thou, and I." (l. 10) If he could keep such great contentment as he experiences during the Lord's Supper, heaven

truly would be his on earth; truly the devout minister did yearn for such bliss. He reaffirms in the poem that elect man's place is beside the throne of God with that of the angels next removed--an affirmation he often reiterates. Elect man's elevation gives angels "Onely the place of Waiting-men." The musical allusion used to express the ecstasy of mystical union here takes the form of the poet's heart becoming Christ's golden harp, perfectly tuned, to sing Christ's praises in the sweetest music, which would be sweeter yet if his heart could hold more; this note of humility is characteristic of the poet. Taylor uses the metaphor of a beam of light--one that he uses frequently--to denote the sanctifying grace of the mystical union, and of the golden harp (gold has a light or shine to it) to designate a praising heart. The poem is closely knit, the poet's humility and sincerity are evident, and his metaphors create the tone of brightness and a prevailing mood of content.

The Experience

Oh! that I alwayes breath'd in such an aire,
As I suckt in, feeding on sweet Content!
Disht up unto my Soul ev'n in that pray're
Pour'de out to God over last Sacrament.
What Beam of Light wrapt up my sight to finde
Me neerer God than ere Came in my minde?

Most strange it was! But yet more strange that shine
Which filld my Soul then to the brim to spy
My Nature with thy Nature all Divine
Together joyn'd in Him thats Thou, and I.
Flesh of my Flesh, Bone of my Bone. There's run
Thy Godhead, and my Manhood in thy Son.

Oh! that that Flame which thou didst on me Cast
Might me enflame, and Lighten ery where.
Then Heaven to me would be less at last
So much of heaven I should have while here.
Oh! Sweet though Short! Ile not forget the same.
My neerness, Lord, to thee did me Enflame.

I'le Claim my Right: Give place, ye Angells Bright.
Ye further from the Godhead stande than I.
My Nature is your Lord; and doth Unite
Better than Yours unto the Deity.
Gods Throne is first and mine is next: to you
Onely the place of Waiting-men is due.

Oh! that my Heart, Thy Golden Harp might bee
Well tun'd by Glorious Grace, that e'ry string
Screw'd to the highest pitch, might unto thee
All Praises wrapt in sweetest Musick bring.
I praise thee, Lord, and better praise thee would
If what I had, my heart might ever hold.

"The Return" continues and embellishes the thoughts of "The Experience" and brings in the additional item of man's recurring unworthiness. The two poems prove to be related in numerous ways. Both refer to heaven; the former says that prolonging of the joy of mystical union would result in, "So much of heaven I should have while here." In the matching poem Taylor says, "Oh! that thou Wast on Earth below with mee / Or that I was in Heaven above with thee." (ll. 5-6) This two-line refrain of "The Return," a device rarely employed by Edward Taylor, is used at the end of every stanza except the last two, where it becomes, in stanza eight, "That thou hast been on Earth below with mee. / And I shall be in Heaven above with thee." (ll. 47-48) and, in stanza nine, "Whilst thou art here on Earth below with mee / Till I sing Praise in Heaven above with thee." (ll. 53-54) Both poems are paeans of praise, one for the contentment and one for the unrestrained joy of the person who knows through mystical union that he is one with Christ. But in the second poem, Taylor mentions "Impoysoning Sin," and speculates upon, "if I / Out of the Vineyard Work be put away," vowing that life then, without sanctifying grace, would be death rather than heaven on earth, and his unclaimed soul would be coffined within

his body, prayerless. These two states of affairs are the crux of the devout minister's greatest concern: knowing the joy of mystical union, or feeling cut off from Christ's grace and forced to question, "Am I saved?"

That certain poems reveal that Edward Taylor, a most devout and orthodox Puritan minister, experienced moments of despair, doubt, and fear of unworthiness, is unmistakable. That he should do so is doubly comprehensible. To the Puritan the Lord's Supper was a periodic attesting to the Covenant of Grace; he was to search deep into the privacy of his own soul to know if he were worthy to partake; for if he were not worthy and partook, he damned himself. The partaking of, even more so the administering of, the Lord's Supper was an alarming prospect to one who approached in the proper spirit of humility. Edward Taylor in his verses meditates upon the awesome dilemma. The second cause for Edward Taylor's doubtings grew from the cares that came to him with being not only the minister to the Westfield congregation, which employed no assisting teacher, but also being his flock's physician, a farmer, and a parent with a large family to feed and to rear. Many must have been the Saturday nights when his week had been so filled and rushed that he sat down to sermon preparation and the ensuing poem of preparatory meditation only too aware of unsolved conflicts, unfinished and pressing problems, fatigue, and lack of time. At such times he must have viewed himself dismally, seeing only what he had not accomplished, and consequently found himself sorely wanting. But when his weeks went well, or when the feeling of certain election seemed particularly upon him, the poet surely felt confident, tender, serene, even

joyous in his election. Either way, after having worked his way through the logic of his poetic analysis, as he consistently did in his basically uniform Meditations by using his uniquely curious mixture of rhetorical vehicles of metaphor and imagery worded in the language of the Bible, the usages of the church, or terms from his university education but especially the homely usages of farm and kitchen language of his own area, he invariably brought himself to the ecstasy of the experience of the mystical union. As he yearned in "The Experience," "Oh! that I always breath'd in such an aire."

In the group of "sad" poems, seemingly there are degrees in his estimation of himself as unworthy man. The metaphors he employs create moods that allow the reader to sense whether he is mildly sinful, definitely troubled, or a veritable sinner. In Meditation 42 the poet contemplates the greatness of his Lord, Whom he likens to golden apples enshrined in silver pictures, or as stones of loveliness melted into a jasper cask that when tapped can furnish the keys, or grace, to unlock the heart so love can come forth. By contrast he sees himself as some strange thing locked into himself with a lock so "sin"-rusted that, of ten thousand keys scarcely one will work to unlock his door, a feat which had seemed effortless in the first stanza when applied to the Lord's state. Worse yet, when the door is opened, the poet finds his love, instead of being lively as "like Birds, may fly to't from its nest," (stanza one) lying cringed in a corner like some shrunken small apple:

> But what strang thing
> Am I become? Sin rusts my Lock all o're.

Though he ten thousand Keyes all on a string
Takes out, scarce one, is found, unlocks the Doore.
Which ope, my Love crincht in a Corner lies
Like some shrunck Crickling: and scarce can rise. (1:42, 7-12)

The reader recoils from a "sin"-rusted lock and the cringing, worthless object it locks in. The Poet's metaphor depicting himself thus reveals that he is in a dejected frame of mind; when he views his sinfulness as great enough that among ten thousand keys scarcely one can be found effective to rescue him, he creates a mood that definitely emanates from the feeling of his baseness. The reader perceives his dejection.

To go from this state to the ecstasy of the mystical union, Edward Taylor utilizes the homely imagery of keys and unlocking already begun in the first two stanzas. Next he exhorts the Lord to open his door with the key of power after rubbing off the rust of his sin. Then his love like that in stanza one will be made vital and will "leap" upon the Lord. "It needs must be, that giving handes receive / Again Receivers Hearts furld in Love Wreath." (11. 17-18) As the sermons of Edward Taylor stress, Christ needs man because of the manhood of Christ; even more man needs Christ, his mediator with God; hence "giving handes receive" is an important interaction in Taylor's religious concept. The recurring words thus far in this poem are key, heart, lock, and love. Stanza four brings the exhortation to "unlock thy Wardrobe: bring / Out royall Robes." Such robes would be those worn only by Christ and his saints, hence highly desired by the poet. He goes on to say that his love in such attire would wait upon and honor his King. The key imagery thus leads to the means to wait upon the King, Who would presumably be seated on the throne to receive the one who would bestow honor. The imagery is con-

tinued in stanza five to a discussion of the palace of grace that the Lord prepares for His own, a shining, bright palace where they possess the same as He: the "Crown of Life," the "Throne of Glorys Place," the "Father's House blancht o're with orient Grace." Love for Christ earns the elect grace, and "grace" now appears in the last four stanzas in place of "love." The transition from love to grace begins in stanza four after the poet's soul is bedecked with the Lord's attire; the word "grace" appears thereafter in every stanza. Clothing imagery figures in several stanzas: "wardrobe," "royall Robes," "attire," "cloath'd," "golden print," and "Robes;" the verb "blanch" (l. 38) as pertaining to the royal robes joins with the idea of that of the Father's House, also "blanch't," (l. 30) Thus Edward Taylor, who at the beginning of meditation sees himself as base, locked in a state of sin and therefore feels downcast, through a circuitous journey (movement) in the poetry now concludes his poem with a hope: that the Lord will adorn him in royal robes and take him to see the bright glories of His royal kingdom. His petition is: "Then take mee in: I'le pay, when I possess, / Thy Throne, to thee the Rent in Happiness." (ll. 41-42) He has arrived at this petition through homely imagery of keys, locks, clothes, and through the two basic elements of love and grace.

In other poems of the sad or downcast category when the poet compares himself to filth, dirt, dead ashes, and vileness, he seems to feel that the degree of his baseness is greater. "Filfth" is a condition he uses freely in the sad poems, and to vivify it, homely metaphors such as "muddy sewer," "tumbrel

of dung," "dung-hill," "varnished pot of putrid excrements," and "garbage." Whenever Edward Taylor sees himself in such unworthy states, the reader feels he is oppressed by thoughts of man's and especially his own sinful state.

When he writes of himself as "A Dirt ball dresst in milk white Lawn, and deckt / In Tissue tagd with gold, or Ermins flush." (1:46, 7-8) as he does in Meditation 46, then he is using the paradox to show his fear of being unworthy. He is expressing his being appalled at the thought that such a low one as he could ever wear the royal robes. Again clothing imagery appears, this time quite compatibly; for the Scripture for Meditation 46 is Rev. 3:5. The same shall be cloathed in White Raiment. This poem of the "sad" category he opens with a question, "Nay, may I, Lord, believe it?" Then he expresses his disbelief that such as he could be clothed in white raiment by the technique of using questions phrased in homely language of colloquialism: Could his Skeg (body) be arrayed in heavenly white robes? Could his "thacht old Cribb" (house) be placed in heavenly "rig"? He reminds the Lord how he really is: "I'm but a jumble of gross Elements / A Snaile Horn where an Evil Spirit tents." (ll. 5-6) One who feels as low as a snail truly feels low; knowing he is also the abode of evil spirits compounds his misery. In the next two stanzas he again describes his state as "Dirt ball" and "Ball of dirt"; he reinforces the metaphor of unworthiness in stanza seven by once more, in question form, portraying himself as a poor "wither'd Stump," "Lump of Clay," "bit of Dirt." His questions still pertain to the validity of even daring to hope to wear the raiment, and he words them thus: Will the Lord dress his withered old stump in a web so white that its whiteness excels the "blackest"

snow? Shall his lump of clay wear better garb than that of the angels? Will his bit of dirt be decked out so fine as to outshine angelic glory? The poet uses questions to advance the movement of his poem. In the intervening stanzas between the two series of questions, he has elaborated upon the statement answering who is to wear the raiment; the statement appears at the end of stanza three: "This whitest lawn most fine / Is onely worn, my Lord, by thee and thine." (ll. 17-18) Now he follows two paths: verifying the rightful wearers, and giving a description of the raiment. The first he achieves by scriptural language, declaring that the statement of limitation quoted from lines 17-18 is no "flurr of Wit," but "It's juyce Divine bled from the Choicest Grape / That ever Zion's Vinyarde did mentain." (ll. 21-22) He answers his chief question in the next two lines: "Such Mortall bits immortalliz'de shall ware / More glorious robes, than glorious Angells bare." (ll. 23-24) The "glorious robes" imagery leads into the next two stanzas which describe the angels' "Web," woven of silk and adorned with a figured pattern, almost gaudy in contrast with Christ's white robes made by the best and noblest art of heaven, of the choicest "twine," richly flowered, but with the living flowers of Paradise. Such glorious robes are for the wearing of only Christ and his saints. Contemplation of such raiment and the possibility of being privileged to wear it by being one of Christ's saints leads the poet to ask the Lord, rather inelegantly after the elegant raiment description, to unload his cart of "all its Dung," and fill it full of grace. He wishes to qualify for the white raiment by being cleansed of sin's dirt by sanctifying grace. Since the Puritans saw God everywhere in the world and in

everything, probably the paradox of the cart emptied of dung and filled with grace would not seem incongruous or unsuitable to Edward Taylor. In this poem the concluding stanza is completely musical, suggesting his joy in mystical union is even more intense when he moves to it from such an uncertain state. He exhorts the Lord to tune his strings so he can "load" (extending the emptied cart metaphor of the preceding stanza) the Lord's glory with songs of praise; pulling out all the stops, he asks to be the Lord's "Shalm" (shawm, a musical instrument) and that his "Shoshannim" (stringed instrument) may raise the Lord's Michtams (psalms of musical derivation). He ends with the promise: "And when my Clay ball's in thy White robes dressd / My tune perfume thy praise shall with the best." (ll. 53-54) Thus, although at the beginning of meditation, when the poet saw himself as dirt, he featured himself as downcast, at the close he has once again arrived at a joyful state (of singing Christ's praises "among the best") through contemplation of the power of the mystical union: "Such Mortall bits immortalliz'de." (l. 23) The clothing or raiment imagery is fairly consistent throughout the poem except in the last stanza of musical terms, and the preceding stanza where there is no form of raiment mentioned. In every stanza except the last there seems to be a holding-up to view of two contrasting situations: dirt and white raiment, mortal robes and angel robes, angel robes and Christ's robes, a cart filled with dung and one filled with grace. Part of the development hence hinges upon paradoxes.

In another poem of the sad category, Meditation 2:17, where Edward Taylor speaks of himself as one who, as a minister,

could have done so much more and instead has done the worst, one feels that he is castigating himself due to inadequacies in carrying out ministerial responsibilities. However, as one continues through the poem, because he later says he sinned, one increasingly feels he is also deploring his sinful unworthiness of his Christ, and that he is compoundly abject. For a minister to be inadequate is bad, but for a minister to sin is indeed a dire circumstance; and, further, in this Meditation, Taylor is working on a doctrine from the text Eph. 5:2. And gave himselfe for us an offering, and a Sacrifice to God. Contemplation of this thought would indeed cause a normally devout minister such as Edward Taylor to lament his horrible, almost irredeemable shortcomings and thus to feel most sad. The effect of the sinner's base behavior is heightened because in the first stanza the poet has stressed Christ's supremacy:

> Thou Greate Supream, thou Infinite first One:
> Thy Being Being gave to all that be
> Yea to the best of Beings thee alone
> To serve with Service best for best of fee.
> But man the best servd thee the Worst of all
> And so the Worst of incomes on him falls. (2:17, 1-6)

The poetic situation dramatizes best and worst. Most people agree that if one who has done his best is repaid by one who has done his worst, the situation is most unfair and grossly deplorable. Edward Taylor sadly confesses in the next stanza that such has been his dealing with his great Supreme:

> Hence I who'me Capable to serve thee best
> Of all the ranks of Beings here below
> And best of Wages win, have been a pest
> And done the Worst, earn'd thus the Worst of Woe.
> Sin that imploys mee findes mee worke indeed
> Me qualifies, ill qualities doth breed. (2:17, 7-13)

Edward Taylor reveals himself as feeling exceedingly dejected. There is a special misery suffered by one who feels he has let someone down, especially a person who deserves the best, and particularly if the one who has failed knows he is highly capable of great achievement. Edward Taylor must have felt at the bottom of the heap. As he says in stanza three, he is in hell, for he is restrained (due to his sins both of omission and commission) from knowing nature's delights and is consigned to knowing her horrors. In the first two stanzas the poet enjoys "using words," and forms of "to be," "be," "being," and "beings," are frequently and effectively employed. The two extremes of best and worst are emphatically depicted. "Worst" becomes the "Worst of Woe" then "sin," which leads quite naturally to "hell" in stanza three. "Sin" extends into the fourth stanza where Taylor cries, "I sin'd"; those two words speak worlds for the grieving Puritan minister, and one shares the pain of his cry. Immediately begins the upward movement, for Christ is bail and "Grace takes him Surety; / Translates my Sin upon his sinless Shine." (ll. 19-20) Legal terms, a favorite imagery with Edward Taylor, advance the fourth stanza through "guilty," "Justice," "sues," and "fine." To pay the fine, which is to quench the fire of hell, the blood not of burnt sacrifices but that of Christ's veins is requisite. Sacrificial terms now abound: "Burnt," "Meat," "Peace Sin," "Trespass Offering," but the sad truth remains; Christ's own blood must pay the fine or the sinner will fry in hell. The unity of this part of the poem begins with the use of "hell" in stanza three; then the poet makes frequent associated references: "fire," "burn," "Burnt," "fry," "burnt," "singe," "Sparke," and "Tinder"

on through the seventh stanza. His resort to prayer comes in stanza six. He knows Hell's fire is allayed for those who belong to Christ, and he implores Christ to make him His so that this hideous wrath may be exorcised from him. He will then go about the Lord's service in a capable manner. In stanza seven he answers the assumed question of why such a sinful one as he can expect aid--the Grace in God, the Love in Christ will be his redemption; he will for a gift then send himself. This gift is described in the next stanza where the poet tells of the gift-self he would wish to send: a Love rolled "ore" and "ore" (gold) in Christ's grace and thereby so refined that it would be more bright than gold and greater than tongue can tell. In employing mining terms, Taylor is using another of his favorite images. In the last stanza, because of the mystical union he has been conveyed from a deeply wicked state to one of knowledge that Christ has given the blood sacrifice alluded to (l. 25) so that "I in thy Service sing / Unto thy Praise upon my Harp within." (ll. 53-54) The ecstasy of mystical union thus transports a most sad sinner, almost on the brink of hell, to a state of singing Christ's praises. The ending of Edward Taylor's Meditations is a foregone conclusion, for in many respects the Meditations are predictably uniform; one wonders at times, however: What is going to be the transportation?

When the poet in another poem of this category writes of his sinful state as in Meditation 1:45 by demeaning each part of his body, the reader knows from the mood created that the poet is experiencing a sense of degradation. When he says his head is a bog of filth, his blood is poison, his heart is a swamp vile with

sin, his members are incontinent "dung-carts," and his whole being is a meadow where hellish hoodlums dally, then he is surely in a perturbed state of mind concerning his relation to Christ:

> My Heart's a Swamp, Brake, Thicket vile of Sin.
> My Head's a Bog of Filth; Blood bain'd doth spew
> Its venom streaks of Poyson o're my Skin.
> My Members Dung-Carts that bedung at pleasure,
> My Life, the Pasture where Hells Hurdloms leasure. (1:45, 2-6)

The dung-cart metaphor and others of such startling contrast and lack of good taste (Your Touch, Tast, Sight say true. The Pope's a whore." 2:108, 16) cause some critics to refer to Edward Taylor as a baroque poet. In this instance the label seems justifiable since despite the intensity of his low opinion of himself as sinful man, one would hardly expect to find, "My members Dung-carts that bedung at pleasure," in a Meditation of the "Crown of Glory," effective though the metaphor is in venting the poet's contempt of his baseness. In the same category is the aforementioned dung-cart usage of Meditation 1:46 where he wishes the dung emptied and the cart to be refilled with Christ's grace.

But the homely metaphors of Puritan New England farm life Taylor does employ frequently and often gracefully to aid succinct communication, as in this same Meditation, where he wishes to become "thy Pasture fat and trim / Where thy choice Flowers and Hearbes of Grace shine trim." (11. 10-11) A fat and trim pasture can signify a person whose spiritual life is productive since flowers and herbs, or blessings of grace are therein grown. In this Meditation he continues in the vein of homely farm imagery to convey himself to his goal, union with Christ; Christ will pay the cost of draining his bogs and gathering all the brush of his

"thicket vile of sin." Thereby he has a bridge from dismal frame of mind to one of rapture at the mystical union:

> thou borrow'st of each Grace
> That stud the Hearts of Saints, and Angells bright
> Its brightest beams, the beams too of the place
> Where Glory dwells: and all the Beames of Light
> Thy, and thy Fathers Glorious Face out spread,
> To make this Crown of Glory for my head. (1:45, 25-30)

In the central imagery of the thicket-to-meadow transformation, the key word to the mystical union seemingly is "beam," one frequently thus used by Edward Taylor. "Shine," another way of seeing "beam," refers to the meadow Christ will pay to have purified; next Taylor states that sins in deceptive guise cannot touch without besmutting the "Shine" and in so doing reveal themselves; in line thirty-five he reverts to the "beames," and in the last stanza to the "Rayes," and glory "bright" that "flames" from the Crown. Taylor's metaphors frequently do not extend throughout the poem and often change from stanza to stanza. Occasionally, however, as evident in the next Meditation and later in Meditation 2:83, the central imagery is uniform throughout. His degrees of sadness seem frequently to determine his metaphors. A good example occurs in the next Meditation, one of the last two of the "sad" group of Meditations to be examined.

When Edward Taylor uses the metaphor of a spider spitting its vomit upon his cheek, then he perhaps feels himself in carnal mind, to the Puritan an acutely base state indicating temptation by Satan. The spider's juice, Satan's temptations, permeates his body and soul and makes of him a huge misshapen bulk that cannot possibly enter the narrow gate of heaven to union with Christ; he deserves to burst and burn in hell, he feels. This

time the poet, who as a physician was especially interested in medical-terms imagery, utilizes a common New England weed, plantain, as his redemptive medicine (as contrasted with aforementioned unwholesome homely metaphors) to restore him to condition fit for the mystical union. The contrasting stages of his soul's condition are thus voiced:

> A spider spit its Vomit on my Cheeks.
>
> This ranckling juyce bindg'd in its cursed stain
> Doth permeat both Soul and Body: soile
> And drench each Fibre, and infect each grain.
> Its ugliness swells over all the ile.
> Whose stain'd mishapen bulk's too high, and broad
> For th'Entry of the narrow gate to God.
>
> Those Gates of Pearle, porter'd with Seraphims,
> On their carbuncle joynts will open wide.
> And entrance give me where all glory swims
> In to the Masters Joy, e're to abide.
> O sweet sweet thought. Lord take this praise though thin.
> And when I'm in't Ile tune an higher pin. (1:47, 6-12; 25-30)

The key imagery one easily follows from "spider's vomit" (What description can be more repulsive!) to "rankling juyce" to "venom" and then to the other "juyce," the redemptive juice of the leaf of plantain, which renders him fit for the ecstasy of the mystical union. He prays the Lord, "take this praise though thin / And when I'm in't Ile tune an higher pin." (ll. 29-30) One would be "thin" after being permeated with venom.

Whenever Edward Taylor makes use of the worst conditions and situations he encounters in daily life to relate his anguished fears of separation from Christ's blessedness, then the reader knows the poet feels the saddest about his base state. When he views himself as a sinner and then characterizes sins as horrible, cursed dregs, rank and poisonous, streaked with the blue, green, and yellow of spoiled or moulded, decaying things,

he is eloquently communicating his estimation of the depth of his own baseness. He heaps on a still more repulsive metaphor: sins are pustules hatched from serpents' eggs; the sins, as most Christians know only too well, are noisy and so worry the doer that he strikes out at them, mourns, and cries. This condition is surely the state farthest from the mystical union that Edward Taylor can express:

> My Sin! my Sin, My God, these Cursed Dregs,
> Green, Yellow, Blew streakt Poyson hellish, ranck,
> Bubs hatcht in natures nest on Serpents Eggs,
> Yelp, Cherp and Cry; they set my Soule a Cramp
> I frown, Chide, strik and fight them, mourn and Cry
> To Conquour them, but cannot them destroy. (1:39, 1-6)

Not often is Taylor thus vehement in contemplating himself in relation to Christ; he at this point does indeed seem far from a mystical union. Yet because Christ is his advocate, he knows: "My Sins make thine, thy pleas make mine hereby / Thou wilt me save, I will thee Celebrate." (11. 45-46)

Thus in this series of Meditations Edward Taylor, in searching for ways to preach unto himself and for evaluation of how he stood in relation to Christ, frequently found himself wanting as revealed by the metaphors he chose to describe himself and the degrees of his baseness. Most of these Meditations he ends with a prayer, a petition, or a bargain pertaining to what he will perform when he is made better through Christ's efforts. As one reads through the two series of Meditations, one realizes through the imagery the poet employs that there were many times, indeed more times when one can deduce from the mood he creates that he approached meditation in a happy frame of mind: calm, serene, confident, tender, or even highly joyous. These oc-

casions must have been the times when his weeks went well and when his devout joy in his ministry and his security in being Christ's own exceeded all else. When thus freed from personal fears, he is moved to utilize rhetoric as such, and words for the love of words, a characteristic of his. When eloquent rhetoric aids him to express his union with Christ as that of "mite" and "All-might," "One Infinite," and "One Finite," and conclude with: "So forever / Yet Oned are in Person, part'd never." (2:44, 13-18), then the reader knows the poet is confident of saving grace. One feels likewise when Taylor meditates upon "the Almighties Mighty All," which means such fullness of life that he comes to see the glory of the mystical union in the fullness of the tree of life: "Tree of Life / From whom Life comes to everything alive." (2:47, 25-26) In still another Meditation of the happy category that is a companion to these two, might and fullness become power, authority, and majesty, all positive terms to the minister happy about his relationship with Christ: "One Sprig of this Authority (of the tree of life) . . . With God it maketh Reconciliation / By offering, and Holy Intercession." (2:52, 17-18)

The garden metaphor appears frequently in Edward Taylor's Meditations; the garden imagery and the imagery of the feast are two he enjoyed using. Invariably his use of the garden metaphor reveals him to be in a state of happiness. Apparently the garden he refers to is the abode of Adam and Eve. The garden is a thing of beauty in Meditation 2:83, and although Edward Taylor seemingly rarely writes describing beauty <u>per se</u>, he comes close in this poem, one which indicates him to be in one of his gentlest moods. He talks of the garden's flowers, beautiful and fragrant; he sees

the garden as a "Paradise indeed," "thy Church," "the Soule of thy Redeem'd," and he concludes with a prayer of homely petition. "Make mee thy Garden; Lord, thy grace my plant: / Make mee thy Vineyard, and my plants thy Vine." (11. 31-32) This poem has unity through smooth transition, for "the Garden" is the expressed subject of each stanza. This intriguing garden excels all, for it has "all delightful Beauteous flowers and sweet," and a "Cloud of rich perfume" emanates from sweet plants. The colors of the flowers, red and white, suggest the wine and bread of Communion. The garden holds the fragrant "Lign aloes," (Agallooh) the "Tree of Life," the trees of frankincense and myrrh, (associated with the gifts of the Wise Men at Christ's birth) the rose of sharon (Christ's blood), lilies (the flesh), aromatic cassia wood (for anointing oil), cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, mace, and fragrant calamus. All the plants are beautiful, healing, or restorative. Such a fragrance literally emanates from the garden as the poet describes it.

This garden, moreover, like a good life is in good order, laid out in alleys and beds; red, pink, and white flowers are budding; it is like the Garden of Eden. When Christ walks into it, all the plants give out their very best fragrances and greatest beauty. This garden poem seems to be describing the life well-lived and its place in one's approach to the Lord's Supper and into union with Christ--the essence of life that Edward Taylor desired in "The Experience," "Oh! that I always breathed in such an aire, / As I suckt in, feeding on sweet Content!" (11. 1-2) From the garden Meditation the reader continuously receives an idea of Edward Taylor in a gentle mood; the poetry is so gently

didactic that one scarcely notes any didacticism, even in the final lines, "When thou Comst in, My Garden flowers will smile / And blossom Aromatick Praise the while." (11. 35-36) In similar "happy poems," the Garden and its most important plant, the "Tree of Life" invariably hold favorable connotations for Edward Taylor. The garden under discussion has the vineyard imagery in the last stanza; this imagery further enhances the garden by again connecting it with the Lord's Supper. The Garden of Eden and the Lord's Supper seemingly are in some mystical way fittingly linked thus. Edward Taylor wishes to be the Garden of the Lord's plant, grace; the vineyard of the Lord's vine, and when the Lord comes into the Garden, he being the vine, desires to supply the rich wine for Christ's cup.

Edward Taylor is a poet of surprising first lines. Often these are questions, statements of fact, part of a longer sentence, or as in Canticles, exclamations. The poet particularly enjoyed the book of Song of Songs, and here most of the first lines are exclamations. Perhaps his highest states of love, adoration, and the exuberance at coming into his preparatory meditation poetry can best be realized as one notes the mood emanating from these first lines in the Canticle series: "A King thou art, my Lord, yea King of Kings," (2:117) "My Lord, (My Love,) what loveliness doth ly," (2:119) "My Deare, Deare Lord! What shall my speech be dry?" (2:120) "Peart Pidgeon Eyes, Sweet Rosie Cheeks of thine," (2:121) "My Deare! Deare Lord! While mine Affections act," (2:122) "My Lord, my Love, my Sov'reign, and Supreme, (2:126) "My Deare-Deare Lord, my Heart is Logd in thee," (2:128) "My Glorious Lord, What shall thy Spouse, decry," (2:129) "My

sweet-sweet Lord who is it, that e're can," (2:130) "Thou fairest of the Fairest kinde alive," (2:134) "How precious are thy thoughts my Lord, to mee!" (2:137) "My blessed blessing Lord I fain would try," (2:138) "My all deare Lord, I fain would thee adore," (2:140) "My Only Dear, Dear Lord, I search to finde," (2:141) "What shall I say, my Deare Deare Lord? Most Deare," (2:142) "Wonders amazed! Am I espoused to thee?" (2:143) and "Eternal Majesty, my blessed Lord" (2:144) These are outpourings from a most loving and exuberant heart; from them emanates a feeling of unsurpassable praise. They need no further elaboration nor adornment insofar as their exuberance is concerned. But since the poet had to be about his work and had a poem to write, it is well that one examine a poem that follows at least one of the first lines. Meditation 2:144. Cant. 6:11. I went down to the Garden of nuts to se the fruits of the Vally, to se whether the Vine flowerished and the Pomegranate Budded. The exuberant first line has already been noted, "Eternal Majesty, my blessed Lord"; the reader expects Taylor to be in a happy, worshipful mood. The first line begins a question in reality that ends, "Art thou into thy Nutty Garden come?" The rest of the stanza both completes the question and reveals the purpose for coming into the garden. This purpose is stated more or less in the same words as the scriptural text. The question of the first stanza is directed to the Lord. Taylor speaks as "I" beginning with stanza two and carries the questioning onward since he desires to know if he is a grafted branch of the true vine. He wishes to <u>know</u> if he is in Christ's garden, if he is a planted pomegranate there and if he flourishes--that is if he buds and brings forth fruit

so that he will escape the pruning hook that would remove him from the Lord's garden. "Garden" is mentioned in the first three stanzas, as well as in stanza five; the pomegranate tree imagery dominates the first two stanzas. The pomegranate tree the poet longs to be is a tree of life, a living, producing tree. He expresses a wish to remain thus productive, hoping the Lord will spiritually "physick" him, if need be, to keep him bearing fruit pleasing to Christ. The last two lines of stanzas two, three, and four bear similar refrains: "Oh let my blossoms and my Buds turn fruite / Lest fruitless I suffer thy pruning hook." (ll. 11-12) "If in thy Nut Tree Garden I am found / Barren thy pruning knife will Cut and Wound." (ll. 17-18) "And cut me off as is the fruitless Vine: / That evermore doth fruitfulness decline." (ll. 23-24) That the poet should be a tree seems important; he mentions also the nutmeg and almond trees. The ever-present fear, however, is of being barren and thus doomed to the pruning hook and separation from Christ. Stanza five paints his desired state as a respectable tree in the Lord's Garden: his branches will be clustered with spiritual grapes (grace) and his limbs bent downward with fruit (good deeds); each bough will be wreathed with spiritual pomegranates so that the fragrance of Lebanon will be upon his vines, blossoms, and grapes. The metaphor here changes from the pomegranate tree to the grape vine. In stanza six both are mentioned as he questions humbly whether his barren soil can ever be planted with spiritual vines and pomegranate trees pleasing to the Lord; the fear of inability to produce comes up again, a fear that almost all people comprehend, but this time he has evidently conquered it, for he

promises spiritual joys when Christ comes visiting. In the final stanza the poet proposes a condition: if the Lord will make him to his mold (a life in the imitation of Christ's was ever Edward Taylor's highest endeavor) though Taylor is of clayey mould, and if Christ will run into the poet His golden spirits, the poet, though clay, will be the Lord's gold trumpet and will trumpet (verb) in angelic melody with gracious skill the glory of Christ. So the poem itself does not really carry out the exuberance of the first line. Canticle 2.3. His fruit was Sweet to my Tast. Meditation 2:163 does carry the exuberance of "Sweet Lord, all sweet from top to bottom" throughout the poem.

Returning to Meditation 2:144, in the course of the poem itself the reader notes similarities to the poems in the sad category that lead one to deduce that the author is downhearted. He reveals a gnawing doubt about living a fruitful life for Christ and bares his nagging fear of being cut off from his Lord. However the joyful first line does lead to the happy conclusion of productivity--of angelic melody. The central imagery concerns the garden's productive fruit tree, and all stanzas except the last pertain to some aspect of this tree. One notes then in a close study of first lines, that startling first lines occur in both categories of poems; and that exuberant first lines do not necessarily introduce a poem of exuberance. The mood emanating from the happy poems is usually joyous, but the poems in this category are frequently static, being pictorial description as in the two garden poems. The poems of the sad category are more exciting, for they do involve movement, a kind of combat against sin that Edward Taylor felt should be waged constantly to keep the

soul safe from sin. Hence in those poems there is the conflict of overcoming the unworthiness and attaining the knowledge of Christ's love.

Edward Taylor's last lines, in both categories of poems, also invoke one's attention in that they frequently express a musical reference. Of the forty-nine Meditations in the First Series, at least nineteen end with the poet's expressing his ecstasy of mystical union in musical terms. The means vary: a golden harp, a tuned, stringed instrument, his voice, a golden trumpet, chiming bells, his rough feet (an awkward metaphor although it could be intended for military imagery, another favorite of Taylor) and pipes, with the poet's singing of praises the one most frequently mentioned. In the Second Series of one hundred sixty-four Meditations, at least one hundred fourteen conclude with a musical allusion; there is a greater range of variety, but again the poet's voice predominates and is used in at least fifty-four. The reader concludes that for Edward Taylor the contemplation of the mystical union seems rightfully to end with music of praise. A check of "Music" in the Concordance of the Bible reveals too many pertinent scriptures to quote. Almost all of them occur in the Old Testament, there being one mentioned in Revelations; many of the passages concern the Levites. A typical musical reference is this one from II Ch. 5:13:

> It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the LORD; and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of Musick and praised the LORD, saying, for he is good; for his mercy endureth forever: and then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the LORD.

But the most definite reason for using music seems to come from Psalm 81 (an exhortation to the praise of God):

> 1. Sing aloud unto God our strength: make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob.
> 2. Take a psalm and bring hither the timbrel, the pleasant harp with the psaltery.
> 3. Blow up the trumpet in the new moon, in the time appointed, on our solemn feast day.
> 4. For this <u>was</u> a statute for Israel <u>and</u> a law of the God of Jacob.
> 5. This he ordained in Joseph for a testimony, when he went out through the land of Egypt...

This section of Psalm 81 can be read as a directive to use music in rightful praise of God.

A consideration of Meditations 2:43 and 2:44 is expedient as an aid in connecting the items heretofore considered in the study of the recurrent theme of the mystical union in Edward Taylor's poetry. These two seem a propos since they appear to be companion pieces and each deals with rhetoric, an art of importance to ministers in Edward Taylor's era; but the first purports an inability with words thus falling into the category of "sad" poems whereas the contrasting Meditation elatedly sets forth a description of the success of rhetoric in praising Christ.

Since the poet first says that when he tries to praise the Lord, the Lord's majesty frightens his mind, tongue, and pen to the extent his words are ineffectual to praise Christ, the reader assumes that Taylor is gloomy because of his rhetoric's failure. He suffers a plight common to many who find themselves tongue-tied in the "presence of the Lord." In the companion poem by contrast rhetoric renders a different effect:

> When, Lord, I seeke to shew thy praises, then
> Thy shining Majesty doth stund my minde,
> Encramps my tongue and tongue ties fast my Pen,

That all my doings, do not what's designed.
My Speeche's Organs are so trancifide
My words stand startld, can't thy praises stride.

Nay Speeches Bloomery can't from the Ore
Of Reasons mine, melt words for to define
Thy Deity, . . . (2:43, 1-9)

The Orator from Rhetorick gardens picks
His Spangled Flowers of sweet-breathd Eloquence
Wherewith his Oratory brisk he tricks
Whose Spicy Charms Eare jewells do commence.
Shall bits of Brains be candid thus for eares?
My Theme claims Sugar Candid far more cleare. (2:44, 1-6)

In the latter since the poet says the orator secures flowers of eloquence from rhetoric's garden for use in his oratory, the reader receives the impression of a mood of confidence and assumes Edward Taylor is happy and feels competent in his relationship to Christ and his praises of Him.

In Meditation 2:43 the key imagery is built around words and in 2:44 around reason. "Words" are used as such in most of the stanzas of the former. In the second stanza Edward Taylor says rhetoric cannot melt words from the ore of reason (reason accomplishes much in the companion Meditation) to define the Deity. Later in the poem this lack is remedied and the Deity is bounteously defined; at this stage of the poem, though, words of the finest twine of reason seem too coarse a garment for the Deity to wear. Edward Taylor proceeds in stanza three to give a fascinating categorization of words: mental words are syllabicated thoughts, oral words are thoughts whistled in the wind, and written words are inky, splotched daubs. Yet such as these are the fairest of his poor mind, and the poet dejectedly wonders whether there can be glasses clear enough to enable the Lord to

read his love. In stanza four he again berates words, vowing that they are befouled and that thoughts are "filthy fumes" from "Smutty Huts," like "Will-a-Wisps" that rise / From Quaugmires, run ore bogs where frogs do Croake," (11. 20-21). Dejected as he seems to feel over his "muddy words so dark," the imagery of this stanza is particularly vivid as the reader mentally envisions the word pictures Edward Taylor is painting. Next he shifts to brightness: "Sun-Shine," "Shining Sky," and the change causes him to ask the Lord to permit him to use this coarse rhetoric, but only to declare his creed and not to beautify Christ, Who is all God despite the manhood joined to Him. This recall leads the poet to contemplate the Godhead, the word "bright" comes back, and his rhetoric begins to assemble wonderful words as he ponders the mystical union. His rhetoric now supplies the great and powerful words and he proclaims his ecstasy:

> Thou art Eternall; Infinite thou art;
> Omnipotent, Omniscient, Erywhere,
> All Holy, Just, Good, Gracious, True, in heart,
> Immortal, though with mortall nature here.
> Religious worship hence belongs to thee
> From men and angells: all, of each degree. (2:43, 43-49)

This is quite a contrast to the condition set forth in a line from Meditation 1:32, "My tazzled Thoughts twirld into Snick-Snarls run." (1. 10) There are no Snick-Snarls in his thoughts as Edward Taylor's stanza of forcible adjectives ring forth impressively in a staccato series. This stanza seems to be Edward Taylor at a special high point in the articulation of the adoration for the mystical union. The companion Meditation has also a verse equally tightly-knit and rapid-moving. In it, however, the passage to the ecstasy of the mystical union is reason and

its bringing him to contemplation of the "Godhead personated in God's Son." Then the poet sings joyously:

> You Holy Angells, Morning-Stars, bright Sparks,
> Give place: and lower your top gallants. Shew
> Your top-saile Conjues to our slender barkes:
> The highest honour to our nature's due.
> Its neerer Godhead by the Godhead made
> Than yours in you that never from God stray'd. (2:44, 36-43)

In this Meditation, "reason," the forerunner of words, helps create the passage from the garden of rhetoric's fragrant flowers to the ecstasy of the mystical union. Oratory becomes things transcendent of reason, Jacob's ladder foils reason's strides, which are wrought of the fact of the divine and human natures in Christ. This union is explored in both Meditations in several plays upon words: "All-Might" and "Mite," "Immortall" and "Mortall," and "Infinite," thereby leading back to the contemplation of the mystical Godhead and Manhood union, "in Holy Writ definde" (2:43) and the "Word-Made-Flesh." (2:44) Edward Taylor is thereby moved to his exuberant proclamation to the angels to give way to those who rightly belong nearer to the Godhead. Homely imagery of nautical language common to the Puritans carries these two stanzas of Meditation 43: "top gallants," "top-saile," "slender barkes," "anchor," (both as noun and verb) "cable," "anch'ring," and "bark" until the poet is represented as knowing, "My bark shall safely ride then though there fall / On't th'strongest tempests Hell can raise of all." (ll. 47-48) Due to his moment of illumination Edward Taylor feels he can resist sin and hell.

When Edward Taylor notes man's elevation above the angels as he does in 2:44 (ll. 37-42) in the passage quoted above, the reader feels he is indeed in confident mood. In Meditation 1:47

he makes angels be porters at the gates of heaven, and in Meditation 2:71 he describes the saints as guests at a sacramental feast where the angels are waiters.

Both Meditations contain first lines that are a part of a longer sentence. Both use metaphors, homely and of educated terms (reason). Both conclude with a promise to praise the Lord when he fulfills the condition set forth. The "sad" Meditation has more movement as the poet fights his way through uncooperative words to fluency: the "happy" Meditation 2:44 is static but depicts an interesting explanation of the achievement of effective rhetoric.

A modern would feel that Edward Taylor had slight reason to be so concerned about the status of his own mystical union with Christ. That he should ever feel doubtful, inadequate, base, or sinful is strange unless one keeps in mind Puritan feelings concerning piety. After conviction that grace had made itself known, the soul even of a minister would still know dejection. The moment of election was not prolonged illumination. After that fleeting moment terminated, Puritans feared that Satan could at any time pretend to be an angel of the Lord and cause man's destruction by deceiving him. Thus for every Puritan there had to be unceasing examination by which he attempted to know that he was elect, sanctified, and regenerated. Like all the rest of the elect, Edward Taylor had his moments of intense fear and doubt as to whether he were of the divine state. But unlike most of the other Puritans, he enjoyed a particular special ecstasy in the mystical union. He utilized two fundamental aspects of meditation, knowledge of self and a pathway to love of God, to convey him poetically to periodic realization of that perception.

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